



Toward a deeper understanding of service marketing: The past, the present, and the future

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ABSTRACT

The authors investigate the intellectual pillars of service marketing and its evolution through key subareas during 1992–2009 using a citation-based approach. They derive insights for the most promising research directions. The results reveal the dynamic influences of different research topics on service marketing. In a graphical representation, the authors further show that the main topics have changed their research orientations over time. For example, the literature on online service & technology infusion reveals an increasingly operational and customer-focused orientation. A citation-based measure of the significance of research opportunities and a comparison with the topics found in recent literature reviews indicate that research on managing business-to-business services & service infusion, complaint handling & service recovery, and enhancing and managing the service value chain are promising topics. These results assist academics and practitioners by revealing what we know about service research and what we need to know in the future.

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Introduction

The increasing importance of services for the growth and prosperity of most of the world's economies appears prominently in the course of daily business. By providing services, firms can raise revenues and market share, even in turbulent, competitive environments (Fang, Palmatier, & Steenkamp, 2008). Therefore, manufacturing companies increasingly seek to attain a sustainable competitive advantage through service offerings (Reinartz & Ulaga, 2008). As the relevance of services continues to grow, research in service marketing becomes increasingly critical (Ostrom et al., 2010).

Service marketing emerged as a distinct subfield of the marketing discipline in the late 1970s (Brown, Fisk, & Bitner, 1994; Shostack, 1977). However, its importance for the entire marketing field has become apparent in the ongoing discussion about service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This discussion places the service discipline on the marketing agenda and reveals the intellectual bonds between service academics and the marketing field. This ongoing discussion of a new logic for marketing makes it ever more important to gain deeper insights into the structure of the service research field, especially for

academics who are not experienced with the insights that service marketing provides and the benefits from its key topics for the field of marketing. Thus, we assert that a comprehensive analysis of the current state of service literature is worthwhile for both academia and practitioners who need to understand the intellectual pillars of service marketing and the progression of the field.

Some researchers have offered comprehensive literature reviews of the service discipline (e.g., Brown et al., 1994; Fisk, Brown, & Bitner, 1993; Grove, Fisk, & John, 2003; Rust & Chung, 2006). These studies have mainly determined the state of service marketing according to ratings by experts or the authors themselves (e.g., Fisk et al., 1993; Grove et al., 2003). Whereas some quantitative studies note the identity of service marketing journals (Svensson, Slåtten, & Tronvoll, 2008) or topics researched in specific journals (Furrer & Sollberger, 2007; Pilkington & Chai, 2008), little research has delved into the intellectual basis and evolution of service research or determined research agendas using quantitative measures such as citation databases. Citation data can offer objective insights and unveil research topics currently undetected by expert evaluations; its use has been recommended as a complement to literature reviews (Tellis, Chandy, & Ackerman, 1999). We provide a quantitative view of the current state of the discipline and a glimpse into the future, based on citation data. Furthermore, we compare our findings to the topics recommended in recent articles and academic conferences to show where our findings are similar and where our data reveal distinct results.

Our quantitative approach relies on citation data from top-tier service and marketing journals over the timeframe 1992–2009. The

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use of citations is worthwhile because citations provide “frozen footprints in the landscape of scholarly achievement; footprints which bear witness to the passage of ideas” (Cronin, 1981, p. 16) that indicate knowledge exchanges among scholars. Citations also reflect developments in a field over time and offer insights into emerging research topics by exhibiting trends in citation patterns (Judge, Cable, Colbert, & Rynes, 2007). We consider several research questions in this realm: What are the most influential works and topics in service marketing? How has the service field evolved over time? What will be the next important topics in service marketing?

This article provides several key contributions from service marketing, methodological, and practitioner perspectives. Researchers and practitioners may gain an overview of existing concepts and insights from service marketing, which may be helpful in light of the explosion of publication outlets that makes it increasingly difficult to keep track of important new insights. Moreover, practitioners can glean key insights regarding important areas for their daily business. To summarize our overview, we provide a graphical representation of the evolution of service marketing that illustrates the intellectual exchange of ideas. This compressed view of the field can help scholars and practitioners who are new to this area to grasp its evolution more easily.

From a methodological perspective, we adopt a longitudinal orientation based on Poisson log-multiplicative models (Pieters, Baumgartner, Vermunt, & Bijmolt, 1999), which enables us to consider the time heterogeneity of the influence of articles and their interrelationships simultaneously. Unlike previous studies that have discussed different periods independently, we link the time periods through a procrustes analysis to draw a dynamic picture of the field and derive research trends. In addition, we employ a measure of upcoming articles and promising research fields that uses citation data to predict potentially influential work. This new measure offers deeper insights into the question of what will be next in the research field.

Literature review

Prior studies have used various approaches to determine the structure and evolution of a research field. The most prominent approaches are comprehensive literature reviews (e.g., Chase & Apte, 2007; Fisk et al., 1993; Heineke & Davis, 2007; Rust & Chung, 2006), insights based on ratings by experts from academia or management (e.g., Grove et al., 2003; Ostrom et al., 2010), and database analyses of citations or journals (Furrer & Sollberger, 2007; Pilkington & Chai, 2008; Svensson et al., 2008).

Although expert ratings and comprehensive literature reviews provide insights and are good sources for identifying future research directions, they suffer some shortcomings. First, they are often limited to a small group of academics or practitioners discussing the future of the research field (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Bachrach, & Podsakoff, 2005). These few, albeit experienced, academics or practitioners comment on the entire research field, which likely limits the representativeness of the results. Second, experts' ratings might be biased toward their own area of interest and expertise (Nerur, Rasheed, & Natarajan, 2008). Third, expert ratings can be biased by the strategic responses of the participants (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2003), such that participation in a study increases the possibility that the expert will promote a particular research direction (Podsakoff et al., 2005).

Citation-based approaches can complement some of these shortcomings of expert ratings or comprehensive literature reviews. First, these approaches offer reliable results, in the sense that there is no interrater bias or strategic response behavior by study participants (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2003). Second, because the data can be retrieved from existing databases, citation data are more readily available than survey evaluations. Thus, citation-based approaches can trace recent developments of a research topic and enable the

researcher to draw large sample sizes from a broad spectrum of research, which can decrease random error in the results (Podsakoff et al., 2005). Third, citations offer the possibility to apply quantitative analyses. In explorative studies, citation analyses might uncover relationships among articles, show the evolution of a research field, or demonstrate the convergence of established research topics (Nerur et al., 2008). In a confirmatory context, they can also test and verify propositions derived from theory or expert ratings (e.g., Stremersch, Verniers, & Verhoef, 2007). Fourth, citation patterns can be tracked over time, which enables researchers to conduct trend analyses and thereby derive insights into future directions (e.g., Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004). In this sense, citation analyses can structure a research field on the basis of objective, reliable data, such that these analyses may detect undiscovered trends through quantitative analysis.

Although citation analyses are well-established, reliable measures of academic influence (Tellis et al., 1999), they are not substitutes for literature reviews or expert surveys. As White and McCain (1998) emphasize, citation analyses could never substitute for extensive reading and elaborate content analyses. Rather, they complement and validate literature reviews based on expert judgments or other qualitative approaches (Nerur et al., 2008). Our approach, therefore, offers an alternative view of the service discipline, and we compare our results with topics outlined in prior studies accordingly (see Table 5).

Method

To address our research questions, we incorporate different components to identify the most influential works and topics, to show the evolution of the research field over time, and to identify the next important research topics in service marketing.

Model description

To analyze the structure and evolution of a research field, we turn to a model proposed by Pieters et al. (1999). In their inferential statistical approach, the authors use a row-column association model to estimate the influence of different journals over time. This model, initially proposed by Goodman (1985, 1987), is a special form of Poisson log-linear models that enables an analysis of cross-classified data and determines associations among variables by means of a multiplicative term (which makes it a log-multiplicative model). Moreover, the model can handle a substantial fraction of zero counts—a relatively common scenario in analyses of cocitations (Agresti, 2002). However, unlike Pieters and Baumgartner (2002) and Pieters et al. (1999), we are interested in evolution at the individual article level. Moreover, with principal component analysis (PCA), we detect research topics based on article citation patterns and derive their dynamics by combining the results of the PCA and the log-multiplicative model. Unlike previous studies, we also combine the different time periods with a procrustes analysis to reveal the evolution of the research field in a graphical representation. Finally, we provide a measure based on a growth rate estimation of influence and uniqueness that indicates each topic's future research potential.

To analyze the cocitation structures of a research field, we base our analysis on the citation-cocitation matrix of cited articles. Two references are cocited if they both appear in the same article (White & McCain, 1998). Thus, a cocitation pattern indicates an intellectual bond between researchers or research topics as well as the influence of a single article on a broader research field. The citation-cocitation matrix represents the frequency of citations and pairs of cited papers such that every row and column represents one cited article. Thus, the off-diagonal elements reveal how often article *i* appears cited together with article *j* (i.e., cocitation), and the diagonal elements indicate the citations of the article itself. In this context, the citation-cocitation

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